



THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST FOUNDATION

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Stewarding ^{God's} ~~Your~~ Stuff



Daniel Hall
Executive Director
MBF

When you hear the term “stewardship,” what thought comes to your mind? Are you reminded of the annual emphasis at your church through which the operating and ministry budget for the upcoming year is prepared, presented, and pledged? For you, does stewardship focus primarily on making periodic contributions of your income to

and through your local church? Have you ever considered the possibility that biblical stewardship is a concept that is not limited to the preaching and practice of giving a tithe (10%) of one’s income to ministry and missions? Have you ever considered the inseparable relationship between biblical stewardship and discipleship? For instance...

A **DISCIPLE** is one whose life is (1) Rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ and who (2) Reflects this relationship by following Jesus’ example of dying to a self so others might know God and live in fellowship with Him. One who (3) Receives the call to follow Jesus as a lifelong journey of obedience and submission to His lordship, and who (4) Recognizes that following Jesus is more important than material possessions (see Luke 14:25-35).

A **STEWARD** is one who is (1) Assigned the management of an estate and who is (2) Accountable to the estate’s owner. One who gives (3) Attention to the future and who is (4) Assured of blessings that accompany faithful stewardship (see Matthew 25:14-30).

“*Rise Up in Christ*” (Acts 3:6, 16) was the thematic emphasis for the Mississippi Baptist Convention during 2014 while “*Building Blocks of a Bold Disciple*” (Acts 5:42) serves as the 2015 emphasis. Against the backdrop of these two themes, please receive this edition of *Foundation News* as a primer on Christian stewardship and bold discipleship within the context of estate stewardship.

Stewards of the Message *to be Proclaimed*

Christian disciples, as followers of Jesus Christ, are confronted with daily opportunities to practice stewardship in every aspect of our lives. Therefore, everyone who professes Jesus as Lord is called to be a Steward of the Message to be Proclaimed. The important message of which we are stewards is introduced in Act 3:6 when Peter declared, “*Silver and gold have I none; but such as*

I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Through the faithful stewardship of Peter and John, a 40-year old lame man encountered the transforming power of Jesus. Jesus Christ is still in the business of putting people back on their feet and encouraging them to engage in a daily and everlasting walk of fellowship with Him. How is this

possible? Because, as Peter proclaimed in Acts 4:13, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*” No attempt to tell the story of Jesus is complete without that message. Furthermore, genuine disciples of our Lord are stewards, entrusted by Him, to proclaim that message of good news and hope.

Stewards of the Moment *that is Presented*

While all Christians are called to be Stewards of the Message to be Proclaimed, we also are Stewards of the Moment that is Presented. I do not believe that Peter and John's encounter with the lame man was mere coincidence nor an occasion offered by chance. Rather, in the providence of God, Peter and John experienced a divine appointment with one man which eventually led to an even larger harvest. Acts 4:4 recounts, "*And the number of men grew to about 5,000.*" Had Peter and John not availed themselves to this opportunity, they would not have been in a position to experience what followed as thousands came to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

When the Sanhedrin charged Peter and John not to teach or preach any more in the name of Jesus, Peter resolutely testified, "...*We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20). The last phrase of the hymn *Share His Love* echoes the focus and fervor of

Peter's testimony with, "And show the world that Jesus Christ is real to you, ev'ry moment, ev'ry day." The moment to tell others about Jesus and his redeeming love is

NOW! Why? Because we are stewards of the moment that is presented and, as hymnwriter Will L. Thompson reminds us, "Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing, Passing from you and from me."

Jesus declared, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field,*" Matthew 9:37-38. We are stewards of the message to be proclaimed and the moment that is presented. Christians are also called to be...



Stewards of the Measure *that is Provided*

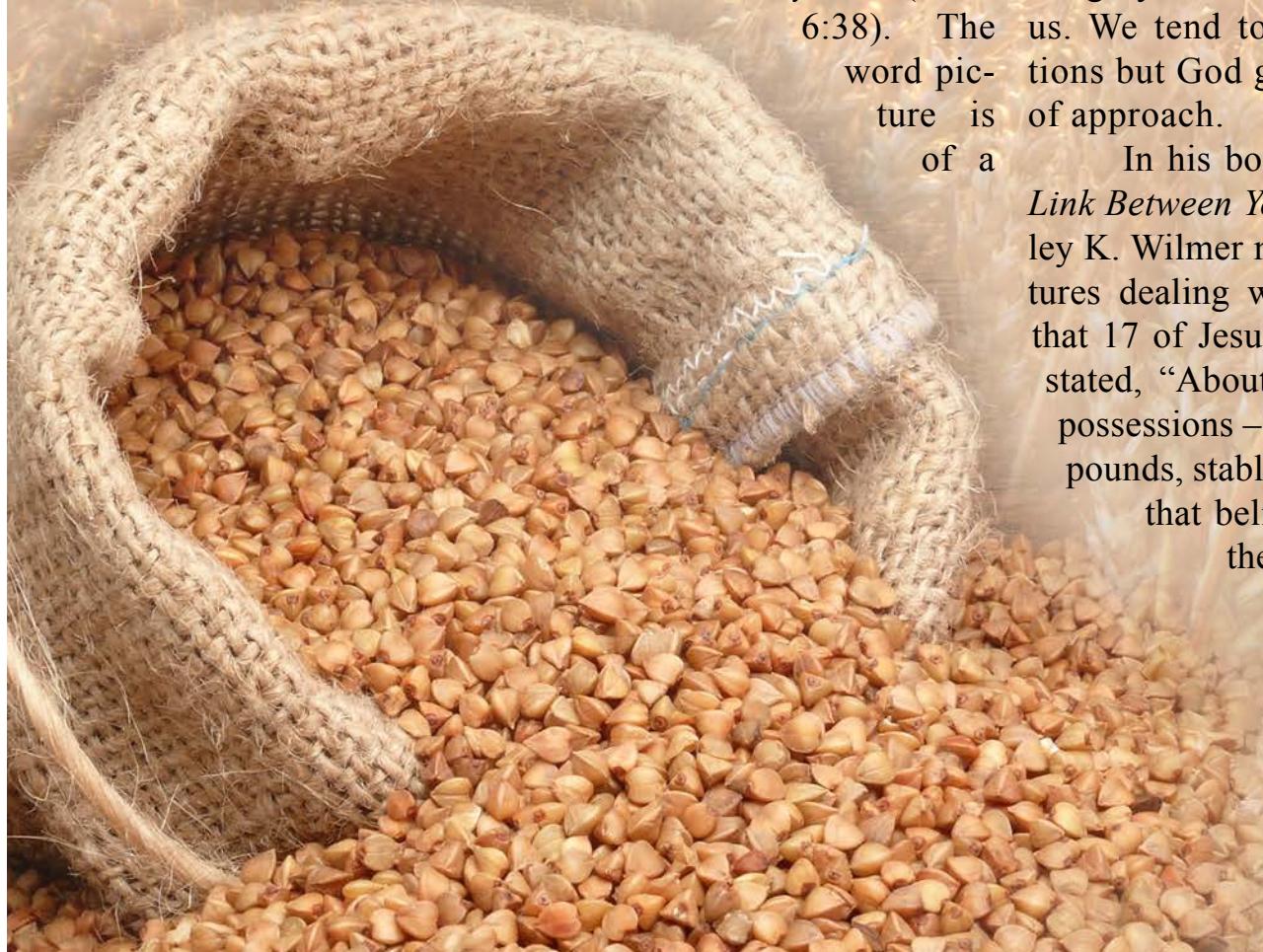
Recorded in Luke's gospel is the exhortation by Jesus to "*Give and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. For with the measure that you give, the same will be measured out to you*" (Luke

6:38). The word picture is of a

merchant who sells grain. With a spirit of fairness and generosity, the merchant handles the filling of each customer's basket in such a manner as to allow for more grain to be added to the point of overflow. This imagery reflects the manner in which God gives to us. We tend to give to Him with thimble-sized portions but God gives to us with a front-end loader kind of approach.

In his book entitled *God & Your Stuff: The Vital Link Between Your Possessions and Your Soul*, Dr. Wesley K. Wilmer noted that the Bible contains 2,172 scriptures dealing with possessions. Wilmer also observed that 17 of Jesus' 38 parables focus on possessions. He stated, "About 15 percent of God's Word deals with possessions – treasures hidden in fields, pearls, talents, pounds, stables, and so on. Obviously God understood that believers would find this a difficult area of their lives to turn over to Him."

Lest you think, "I don't have an estate" and feel that Luke's admonition applies only to those who qualify for the old television program "The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," please know—if you have **stuff**, you have an estate.



And, because God is the owner of everything (Psalm 24:1), he expects us to be good stewards of the measure that he has provided. Even still, many of us may be prone to rehearse the first part of Peter's response to the lame man's request for alms and declare, "Silver and gold have I none..." Before adhering to this perspective, however, consider the opportunity for Christian stewardship available from your "big jar" of assets.

Estimates by the Internal Revenue Service suggest that the overall net worth of most individuals can be divided into two jars. One container ("small jar") holds approximately 9% of a person's assets. In general terms, the small jar represents one's cash assets and perhaps may focus primarily on that person's stream of income. The other jar ("Big Jar") contains approximately 91% of a person's wealth and consists of such items as investments (stocks, bond, mutual funds, etc.), real estate, equity in our home, life insurance, retirement assets and a host of other resources that constitute the majority portion of one's estate.

Interestingly enough, we tend to limit our understanding and practice of stewardship to "first fruits" giving which emphasizes gifts from our income. According to Fred Smith of *The Gathering*, 96% of all gifts to the church are derived from cash assets. When we consider the fact that Mississippi Baptists give

about \$400 million annually in undesignated gifts to/through our Southern Baptist churches in Mississippi, then we must also recognize that 96% of this total came from only 9% of our collective net worth.

Barry Bledsoe is the president of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama and the creator of the "Big Jar/Little Jar" visual. Bledsoe stated in a discipleship study that he authored, "Upon seeing the illustration of one's assets in penny jars, two truths come immediately to mind. First, if we base our stewardship on cash only, we are ignoring 91% of God's material blessings to us. And, second, our mind-set in estate planning should be based upon the assets represented in both jars – cash and acquired assets."

When realizing that the single greatest act of Christian stewardship and obedience that any of us may have in the course of our lifetime is the decisions we make regarding the distribution of our estate or "Big Jar" assets, then the opportunity that you and I have to be stewards of the measure that is provided is mind-boggling. Therefore, in addition to being Stewards of the Message to be Proclaimed, and Stewards of the Moment that is Presented, and Stewards of the Measure that is Provided, Christians are encouraged to be...

"if we base our stewardship on cash only, we are ignoring 91% of God's material blessings to us."

**— Barry Bledsoe, president
The Alabama Baptist Foundation**

Stewards of the Methods *that are Prescribed*

Far too many people fail to plan adequately for the time when the Lord calls them into "higher service" with Him. A large percentage of our population (some estimates are between 50%-70%) die without having a valid Last Will and Testament in place. Perhaps many of these same individuals feel like they don't know where to begin with

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respect to establishing an estate plan. In reality, creating an estate plan need not be complicated or overwhelming. Three documents that should be considered when developing an estate plan include (1) a Last Will and Testament, (2) a Durable Power of Attorney, and (3) an Advance Health Care Directive. The Mississippi Baptist Foundation has resources and information available for understanding these three items.

With a Last Will and Testament, decisions regarding the distribution of estate assets can be recorded for implementation at the proper time. Unfortunately, however, many (perhaps most) individuals who have prepared a valid Will have not included charities in general, or their church or other King-

dom ministries in particular, within their estate planning documents. While educational institutions and other non-profit organizations promote and encourage giving through one's Will, the church has not fully embraced this important avenue for Christian stewardship.

According to a recent survey conducted by LifeWay Research, 86% of Southern Baptist churches do nothing in the area of estate stewardship/planned giving promotion. When considering the truth that the manner in which a Christian plans for the eventual distribution of their "Big Jar" (estate assets) may be the single greatest act of stewardship that will be available in the course of a lifetime, the lack of engagement in estate stewardship promotion by our churches is resulting in untold numbers of missed opportunities for Kingdom stewardship among Mississippi Baptists. Perhaps your church could consider developing an estate stewardship ministry.

the distribution of 'big jar' assets may be the greatest act of stewardship in a person's lifetime

Together, Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 14:25-35 provide a concise summary for practicing stewardship as a disciple of Jesus Christ. With the overarching goal of fulfilling the Great Commandments and the Great Commission by proclaiming Jesus to whomever, whenever and wherever opportunities arise, the inclusion of Kingdom ministries and missions in one's Last Will and Testament becomes a natural step for Christians. Local church ministries, Lottie Moon, Annie Armstrong, Cooperative Program, Baptist Children's Village, Baptist college and seminary scholarships, and others could be blessed through your estate plan.

January is "**Make Your Will**" month. Your friends at the Mississippi Baptist Foundation are available to help you understand how your estate plan could "Give It Twice" with a "Family and Faith...Kids and the Kingdom" approach to stewarding YOUR...I mean, GOD'S stuff!